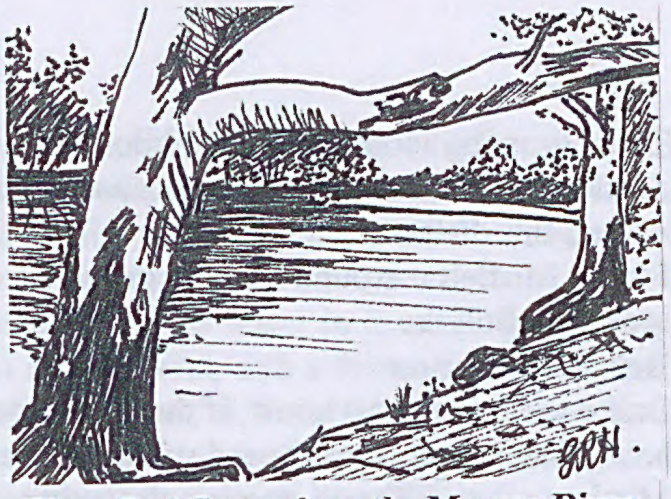
Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2005
Vol. 30.4 #321



River Red Gums along the Murray River.

Mistletoes 8/4/05

Unfortunately Lindy Raild had to postpone her presentation until July because we were unable to procure a digital projector at short notice. Instead members contributed to an open discussion on mistletoe which proved to be very informative.

Tony Morton

In Europe the Druids used mistletoe to make a potion that would give super strength – possibly because, as a parasitic plant, it remained green all year round. It is also a magical plant because two groups of butterflies feed on it:-

Jezabels – Imperial Whites lay their eggs on Eucalypts and feed on the wiry mistletoe that grows on the Cootamundra Wattles. Wood Whites also feed on mistletoe.

Azures - female Ogyris amarilis lay eggs on Wiry Mistletoe. Ants march caterpillars out at night to be fed.

Rita Mills

Mistletoes almost never kill a tree – but are more likely to die themselves.
Honeyeaters rely on them for food when Eucalypts are not flowering.
They provide good dense nesting sites.
Their flowers are very attractive.
Harlequin Mistletoe tastes like watery custard.
Most mistletoe leaves blend with the host plant by having similar leaves.

Ian Higgins

Ian recalled trying to grow mistletoes some time ago – the pale green seeds germinated within one week but then seemed to remain dormant - so he was discouraged. He later was told that mistletoe needs to germinate on small twigs. Ian commented, "If this is so, Creeping Mistletoe, that always seems to be growing on large branches, must have been there a long time."

Possums are fond of mistletoe - attempts to grow mistletoe in Melbourne were hampered by possums that chewed off the young plants. This may explain why mistletoe is found on isolated/edge trees rather than forest trees – the possums don't reach the more isolated trees as they don't like to cross open areas.

Trees growing more than three kilometres from bush blocks don't usually have mistletoe on them – possibly because the range of the Mistletoe Bird does not exceed this distance.
Fleshy Mistletoe around Benalla grows on other mistletoes. Harlequin Mistletoe grows on Bulloke.

Bruce Donaldson

Bruce was curious to know, if the Mistletoebird spreads the seed in the southern hemisphere, how was the seed spread in the northern hemisphere? But as English Mistletoe is a different species altogether it may be spread by different means. Our own Mistletoebird sits sideways on the branch ensuring the safe deposit of the seed which passes very quickly through its system. This led someone to ask what benefit does the bird get from the seed if it is so quickly eliminated?

Richard Piesse

Different mistletoes have specific host trees. It is interesting to note host plants that might be unusual. Richard has seen Mistletoe growing on Liquid Ambers and Pinnoaks in Melbourne. He also raised the possibility that other birds such as Painted Honeyeaters and Thornbills might spread seeds.

For More Information regarding Mistletoes:
Castlemaine Naturalist - February and May 2004 editions,
CFNC publication "Mistletoes' (available at meetings and in the library)
Bird Australia magazine "Wingspan" - Sept 2001 and March 2004.

Swift Parrots

Debbie has been monitoring the Swift Parrots since 2001. Usually they are present between April and October, arriving about Anzac day, but this year they have appeared a month earlier. Debbie would like to know –
Why have they come earlier this year?
Do the adults come first or together with the juveniles?
They have been seen feeding on the ground less than ten times – what are they feeding on? Their call changes to a low murmur on the ground - why?
Are they in trouble in Tasmania – are their food sources threatened?
Further Information: Birds Australia magazine "Wingspan" – June 2002.

Club Visit to Robinvale 20-23 April 2005.

Ern and Lesley have got to know the Robinvale area fairly well over several years and suggested a Club camp up there. Ern worked out a flexible itinerary, and even a suggested route, which took in some very nice birding spots on the way.

Maggie and I caught up with them at the Inglewood Botanical Gardens. There seemed to be Red Wattlebirds everywhere, but Mistletoebirds, Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeets were busy in the flowering eucalypts. The most notable plants there were the mistletoes - Box Mistletoe still in flower, and Fleshy

Mistletoe, which grows on other Mistletoes, with fruit on it. I had a taste and found it slightly sweet and quite pleasant, if you don't mind the mucilaginous texture. Flowering Blue Mallee was the main attraction for the honeyeaters.

Our next stop was at Boort. Little Lake Boort has water in it, and lots of birds, especially Silver Gulls! However, on a short walk, and a drive around the lake, we also located some Black-tailed Native Hens, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill, a Darter and a small flock of White-breasted Woodswallows. These were just a few of the 30 birds *I* recorded there, and there were more that I missed.

The Goshen Flora and Fauna Reserve (FFR) was very dry but we still found Welcome Swallows, as well as the more-to-be-expected Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, in the Mallee type vegetation. This delightful little reserve also yielded Mulga Parrots and a White-fronted Honeyeater.
There had been so much to see, and this was our afternoon tea spot, so we decided that we'd better leave Wood Wood til the trip home.

On Thursday we headed out to the Tol Tol FFR and though it was extremely dry we still found birds, and heard calls. One of the highlights was a Gilberts Whistler, and we identified Cattlebush (*Heterodendrum oleifolium)*and Sugarwood (*Myoporum platycarpum)*, which seemed quite common there.

Someone called for identification of a nest, which proved to be a smooth silken bag of one of the processionary caterpillar species. This one was goblet shaped, and wound around three small branches. About 5 metres from the ground, it appeared to be about 30cm high, the top appeared to be open, and the fine golden webs around the top were liberally sprinkled with droppings. (Someone thought it looked like it was made of plastic). One thing I found to be different from other processionary caterpillars was that I couldn't find a trail of silk down to the ground.

Our next stop was the Bannerton FFR, where we walked for about an hour, finding such things as White-browed Babblers, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and a flock of about 10 Weebills around an almost fully constructed nest. The highlight of this FFR was the discovery of a juvenile Boobook Owl, which was located quite near the highway.

Wemen FFR yielded a Red-capped Robin, and some prickly pear, which Bruce carefully picked and gave several of us a sample to taste - and Amanda told us how they should be eaten to avoid the spines!

We were by then quite close to the Mossbank FFR, the site of the old primary school (1927-1945), and so we drove on to that site. There were lots of calls but

few birds identified, but a huge old Black Box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens)*, not far from the road, was worth the visit just to see it.

Everyone went their separate ways back to Robinvale, and Ern, Lesley, Maggie and I detoured through Wemen itself, stopping at a couple of places on the river, and adding quite a few birds to the list, including a Striped Honeyeater and Caspian Terns.

Geoff and Geraldine were the last to leave the FFR and reported that it took 45 minutes to go the 500m to the sealed road because the birds were at last showing up, in numbers. They saw two brown falcons (one was a light morph form), Mulga Parrot, Eastern Ringneck, Mistletoebird and a Red-capped Robin.

On Friday we went walking in the morning, first over the road to the park behind the Civic Centre to see the Blue-faced Honeyeaters, many of which were in the flowering *Eucalyptus woodwardii* which have been planted in front of the building. A large Casuarina at the back of the park was alive with birds, including Rufous Whistlers and Thornbills. The walk along the river afterwards was delightful, with Striated Pardalotes calling near their nest holes, Superb Fairy-wrens darting in and out of the saltbushes and dozens of Maned Ducks everywhere. Yellow Rosellas were common, too,

After morning tea we drove out to Tol Tol again, but this time we turned down on to the river and the shade of the huge old Red Gums, as it had become quite hot. There were lots of birds. On and over the water we had Purple Swamp Hens, Black and Maned Ducks, and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill. A Little Grassbird was in the nutgrass at the edge of the water, only about 15 feet away. There was a Clamorous Reed-warbler spotted among the reeds, and lots of small bush birds including Red-capped Robins, Yellow-rumped Thornbills , and Willie Wagtails in the bush above the bank. Best of all, though, was the White-breasted Sea-eagle, which came soaring over as we finished our lunch in the shade of the Red-gums.

We ended the day at Lock 15, where there were lots of Cormorants, Pelicans and several Darters fishing below the Spillway.

Most of us drove home by different routes, but Maggie and I met up with the Perkins at Wood Wood to wander through one of their favourite reserves for an hour. Again it was very dry, but we still found lots of birds - including Inland and Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Silvereyes and Weebills.

Lunch was at Lake Boga, and there we found two new species for me - Marsh Sandpipers and Greenshanks. Later at the Bird Hide on Reedy Lake we had

some good birding, with Hardheads added to the list, but the most outstanding sightings there would have to be the thousands of Straw-necked Ibis which were continually coming and going, rising and flying off, wheeling and coming in to land. Two more Whistling Kites were sighted, but there was no sign of the Marsh Harriers that I could really be sure of.

We finally arrived back in Castlemaine late in the afternoon, quite weary, but very satisfied with a most enjoyable, and stimulating, four days. Thank you Ern and Lesley for sharing these special places with us. Rita Mills

Some of the mallee plants identified were: Narrow-leaved Red Mallee *(Eucalyptus. leptophylla),* Blue Mallee (*E. polybractea),* Leaflless Ballart *(Exocarpus aphyllus),* Belah (*Casuarina cristata),* Desert Cassia (*Senna nemophila),* Saltbush sp., Oil/Acorn Mallee (*Eucalyptus oleosa),* Hard-leaf Wattle (*Acacia sclerphylla),* White Mallee (*Eucalyptus gracilis),* Comb Grevillea (*Grevillea Huegelii),* Berrigan (*Eremophila longifolia)),* Weeping Pittosporum (*Pittosporum phillyreoides),* Rosy Bluebush (*Kochia/ Bassia eriocladа),* and Porcupine Grass (*Tridia irritans),*

Geraldine Harris

NOTE: A watch was left behind at the cabins in Robinvale – contact the park if it belongs to you .

Pelicans Only!

Our leader was amused when he casually inquired at the Robinvale Tourist Information Centre -
"Where's a good place to see birds?"
"There's only one sort of bird around here – Pelicans." was the reply.
"Any others?"
"No - just scrub all the way to Mildura."

Fleshy Mistletoe

Many of the Box Mistletoes in Inglewood Botanic Gardens are host to Fleshy Mistletoe. The green of the fleshy mistletoe contrasts with the bronze of their hosts. A good place to look is along the reservoir bank. Fleshy Mistletoe (Amyema miraculosum) is parasitic on other Mistletoes. Ern Perkins

What's New on the Web

Club Camp at Robinvale April 2005
Thornton (Snobs Creek) Campout March 2005 (link)

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo

Did you know the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo which is threatened with extinction, is the Official Mascot of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games in March next year?

He has been given the name of 'Karak' after his distinctive call and "he embodies the spirit of the Games, as uniquely Australian and welcoming to all. His gregarious nature and rugged good looks make Karak the perfect Mascot to unite city and bush".

These large birds feed almost entirely on Brown Stringybarks and Bulokes, and it is believed there are less than 1000 left.

Liz Hopkins, North West Grampians Newsletter.

Observations

- Box Mistletoe growing on Cherry Ballart which is itself a root parasite, between Crusoe Road and Reservoir No. 7. Black Swans on Crusoe Reservoir, and Fan-tailed Cuckoo as well as Bronzewing Pigeon at home in Castlemaine. Richard Piesse.
- A "more white than black" Magpie with blue-grey blotchiness all over (even its beak) in Macedon area. Bruce Donaldson.
- Debbie Worland's bird list included Swift Parrots, White-browed Babbler and Black-chinned Honeyeaters.
- Magpies in family groups on the roadside all the way down White Gum Road after very windy night – so busily occupied one turned and threatened the passing car! Diane Thomson.
- Hearing about the attacking, Magpie, Bruce Donaldson recalled his car being head butted twice by a wombat!
- Hans van Gemert was curious to know more about the showers of white lurp casings under the trees on the golf course that seem to be heavier than normal.
- A Fantail Cuckoo stayed in Dianne Thomson's garden at Barkers Creek giving plenty of time for identification.
- 1/5 4 -6 Noisy Friarbirds at Golf Course this morning. Debbie Worland
- 2/5 We watched, facinated, as a Wood White Butterfly performed aerial antics at the lookout on the top of Mt Zero in the Grampians, - repeatedly flying into wind and then gliding back with the breeze. Geraldine, Geoff and Jarrod Harris.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Extra Events

MAY

Fri. 6. **Mt Alexander Shire Walks and Trails Committee**, Ray Bradfield rooms, 7.30pm.

Mon. 9. **FoBIB AGM – Why do Threatened Species Matter?** Julie Kirkwood .Continuing Ed. Templeton St. 7.30pm.

Wed. 11, **Mapping of Remnant Natural Vegetation in NW Victoria**. Alison Oates. Bendigo FNC. Golden Square Sen. Cits. Old High Street. 7.30pm.

Mon. 30. **Funding Workshop for Landcare,** Castlemaine Town Hall, 7 – 8.30pm.

NOTE : Change Of Date Bendigo FNC. "Owls of the World" Talk is on Nov 9 not October 12 as printed in April Newsletter. Contact: Rod Orr 5443 5668

From the Business Meeting 28/4/05

- **Welcome to new member**: Cathy Newing
- Eight more quadrats have been completed in the Helge Track, Green Gully and Red White and Blue Mine areas. Ern intends to do more and also consult with David Avery to obtain photos of areas for reference.
- A mediation exercise with council members and those objecting to the new planning scheme C24 has resulted in inclusion of the Swift Parrot Management Plan and authorisation for consultant David Robb to negotiate with objectors – further meetings are planned.
- Members who attended "Forests for the Future" meetings reported strong support for making biodiversity the absolute priority but also the impossible task of trying to please everyone.
- As part of the Heritage Festival, .Ern and Richard are preparing two walks around the original municipal boundaries using 1850 maps.
- Volunteers for Swift Parrot Survey needed. See programme, page 8.
- Richard reported control burns carried out two weeks ago on Helge Track. More are planned along Jacobs Track. Doubts were expressed regarding planned strategies for areas where threatened species are present.
- August 25. Cape Broom Pull, 9am.
- Planting Bee to plant out Frances's plants in August – weather permitting.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
May 2005

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.
Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the Old Tourist Information Centre (OTIC) opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and afternoon tea.
Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

MAY
Fri 13. Habitat. James Radford, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. 8pm.
Sat 14. Habitat Walk. Harris's at Barkers Creek. Leave from OTIC at 1.30pm.
Sat 14 Sun 15. Threatened Bird Network Swift Parrot Survey.
Bird Spotters wanted Sat. 8am – noon and Sun. 1.30pm. Meet at the Old Tourist Information Centre. Details at the May Meeting. Co-ordinators Maureen and Ken Dredge Ph. 5470 6474.
Sat 21. Heritage Festival Walk - around the original Municipality of Castlemaine. A long and a short walk. Meet at Market building, 9am.Leaders Ern Perkins CFNC, Ph 5472 3124, Richard Piesse, MAS Walks and Trails Advisory Board, Ph. 5472 3191.

JUNE
Fri 10. Birding off the SE Coast of Tasmania. Nigel Harland. 8pm.
Sat 11. Herons Reef. Leader: David Bannear. OTIC at 1.30pm sharp.

JULY
Fri 8. Mistletoes. Lindy Raild, Biodiversity Team, Deakin Uni. UCA 8pm.
Sat 9. Mistletoes. - Inglewood / Kooyoora State Park.

2005 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph. 5472 4553	George Broadway (Sec). Ph. 5472 2513
Hans van Gemert (Treas)Ph. 5472 1082	Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191
Ern Perkins (Web).....Ph. 5472 3124	Athol Dorman
Nigel Harland.....Ph. 5472 8246	Chris Morris .....Ph. 9885 4221

Geraldine Harris (Ed).....Ph. 5474 2244, gedharris@castlemaine.net

Subscriptions for 2005
Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30
Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24
The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*